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ABSTRACT

A survey of 54 teachers and 12 educable mentally retarded (EMR) secondary students was conducted to determine the academic, social, and emotional-psychological adjustment of mainstreamed EMR students. Separate questionnaires were developed and administered to teachers and EMR students. Results revealed teachers' somewhat negative perceptions of the students' academic performance and emotional-psychological adjustment. Teachers perceived the students as generally well liked and fairly friendly. Students' self perceptions included general satisfaction with their academic performance and confidence in their own abilities despite feelings of failure when they cannot perform. (CL)

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A Profile of the Mainstreamed EMR

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A Profile of the Mainstreamed EMR

ABSTRACT

In a quest for information applicable for classroom use in teaching educable mentally retarded (EMR) secondary students, the authors conducted a survey involving three schools, fifty-four teachers, and twelve EMRs. The purpose of the survey was to determine the academic, social, and emotional--psychological adjustment of EMRs mainstreamed into the regular classroom, based on the perceptions of the EMRs and of classroom teachers. Separate questionnaires were developed and administered to the two groups. The instruments contained statements designed to evoke responses related to the adjustment of EMRs in the three areas. A five-point rating scale was used to indicate the degree of adjustment.

The results of the survey revealed the following observations: (1) The teachers did not think EMRs perform as well in any of the areas rated as did the EMRs themselves; (2) The teachers felt that adjustment was poorest in the academic and emotional--psychological areas but somewhat better in the social area; (3) The EMRs generally expressed positive feelings toward school and other people but did not seem to think the feelings are mutual; (4) The EMRs appeared to be reasonably confident in their own abilities but said they suffer from feelings of failure when they cannot perform; (5) The EMRs reported general satisfaction with their academic progress and competencies in basic skills.

The survey indicates a considerable disparity in the perceptions of the two groups, especially in the academic area. This could reflect unrealistic goals, inadequate communication of student progress, and/or inappropriate evaluation procedures.

A Profile of the Mainstreamed EMR

One measure of the success of the so-called "mainstreaming" concept often associated with the implementation of Public Law 94-142 must be the extent to which handicapped children have adjusted to an environment that includes the non-handicapped. Hagerty & Howard (1978) noted that some handicaps are more receptive to mainstreaming than others. They suggested that children with physical handicaps are usually more successfully mainstreamed than are those with varying degrees of retardation. Several studies (Goodman, Gottlieb, & Harrison, 1972; Gottlieb, Semmel, & Veldman, 1978; Guinagh, 1980) have generally concluded that the mentally retarded person has not been socially accepted by his/her non-retarded peers. Other investigators (Woodard, 1980; Stager & Young, 1981; Frith & Mitchell, 1981), however, found that the educable mentally retarded student has not been socially accepted by normal students, but neither has he/she been socially rejected. Scholom, Schiff, Swerdlik, and Knight (1981) reported on a three-year study of learning disabled children in mainstreamed and self-contained classes. Their data included ratings of personal, social, and academic adjustment gained from teachers, parents, children, and achievement test scores. They found that the parents of young mainstreamed children rated their childrens' personal and academic adjustment poorer one year than in the previous year. The students themselves also reported a decline. In contrast, the teachers of these students saw a trend toward improvement in social adjustment. In the third year of the study, all the children felt they had deteriorated in their personal, social, and academic adjustment. Their parents also felt that there was a decline, especially in academic performance. Again, the teachers reported improvement, particularly in social and personal adjustment.

In a quest for information that could be useful for classroom application with high school educable mentally retarded (EMR) students, the authors of this article conducted a field-problem study. Its purpose was to determine the status of mainstreamed EMR secondary students academically, socially, and emotionally-psychologically as perceived by the students themselves and by regular classroom teachers.

METHOD

Instrumentation

Separate questionnaires were developed for teachers and for EMRs by the authors with input from regular classroom teachers as well as special education teachers. The teacher questionnaires contained three sections, each with nine to eleven statements designed to reflect the social, emotional-psychological, or academic performance or adjustment of EMRs. The user was directed to rate EMRs as a group according to each statement, using a 5-point Likert-type scale. Space for additional comments was provided.

The EMR questionnaires were designed to evoke responses in the same three general areas as the teacher questionnaires. The statements were simplified, and instead of a numerical rating scale, response symbols in the form of figures having five different facial expressions were used. If the EMR chose to express an extremely positive response to a statement about him/herself, a cheerful smilie face would be used, while an extremely negative response would be indicated by a sullen, frowning figure. For students with reading or comprehension problems, the use of a nonverbal technique such as this can be highly effective and has been used in other studies by Zigler (1973) and Miller and Gottlieb (1972) as cited by Hayes & Prinz (1976).

The questionnaires were field-tested for validity and clarity by six

teachers and two EMRs. Suggestions for revision were incorporated into the original questionnaires.

Subjects and Procedures

Three secondary schools within a 25-mile radius of each other were involved in the study. The EMR students asked to participate were ninth- and tenth-graders who had been placed in regular classes for at least a part of each day. They were told that they would be helping to find out how students felt about certain things at school. They were encouraged to be honest since they would not give their names and no grades would be given for the activity. Since EMRs frequently experience reading difficulties, the questionnaire items were read aloud by one of the authors. Twelve EMRs elected to participate.

One hundred and two teachers were contacted, briefed on the purpose of the survey, and provided with questionnaires to be completed if they had EMRs in any of their classes and if they desired to participate. Fifty-four completed questionnaires were returned.

RESULTS

Teacher Perceptions

The teachers as a group perceived the EMR as generally well-liked by others and as being fairly friendly to and cooperative with others. Seemingly, the EMR likes school and his/her teachers but is reluctant to participate in extra-curricular activities and does not usually volunteer for extra assignments. The teachers did not think the EMRs form close relationships with non-EMRs; however, they saw them as trying to emulate others' good behavior traits to a satisfactory degree.

As a group, the teachers perceived EMRs as having adjusted only at a

low to satisfactory level in the emotional-psychological area. He/she tends to become embarrassed and frustrated easily and does not appear to have a positive self-concept. A short attention span is characteristic and may be related to poor task performance and a seeming lack of interest in class activities. Interestingly, only one questionnaire statement related to emotional-psychological adjustment received a mean rating of at least 3 (which would be average or satisfactory on the 5-point scale) by the teachers. It was "The EMR accepts class limits or rules."

Teacher perceptions of EMR academic performance were somewhat negative. Only one teacher surveyed gave a rating higher than average on any statement of academic performance. The majority rated reading and writing abilities as below average. The ability to perform simple mathematical computations was rated below average by 39% of the teachers, but almost as many (33%) gave an average rating to this item. Seventy-six percent of the teachers said the EMR has not satisfactorily developed a basis for future learning.

Student Perceptions

All EMRs reported that they like their teachers (at least sometimes), and a majority said school is a good place to be. Almost everyone (83%) said they like their classmates, but only half claimed to have at least one close friend at school. To the statement, "Most people here don't know who I am," over half (58%) responded positively. Interestingly, when asked if they would like to play ball on the school team, the students as a group were divided (50% said no), but when asked if they felt they could play well enough to make the team, the response was entirely positive (everyone said yes).

For other statements related to self-perception, the results were somewhat

mixed. Only half of the students expressed confidence when asked if they could do their schoolwork, and roughly one-third said "sometimes." Becoming easily embarrassed in school was reported as a problem with almost everyone (83%). A high percentage (75%) also said that failure causes them to become upset.

Academically, the EMRs felt they were fairly adequate. Most claimed to make average grades and said they were satisfied with their grades. Approximately two-thirds of the students, though, reported that the majority of their classmates get better grades than they do. Practically everyone (92%) felt he/she could write well enough for anyone to read, and only a few (17%) said they could not read well enough to follow directions for building something. With reference to the ability to solve simple mathematical problems after an explanation, half said "sometimes" and 33% said "yes." Eighty-three percent felt they "learned many useful things in school." On all questionnaire items in the academic area, the mean rating (using the 5-point scale) for the EMR group was 3.50, which is above average.

DISCUSSION

One must be very careful in drawing conclusions from a survey involving a limited sample of subjects, such as the one described in this article. Perhaps even more risky is the assumption that these findings might apply to other groups of similar subjects or even to individuals. With this disclaimer in mind, certain observations seem appropriate:

1. The teachers did not think EMRs perform as well in any of the areas surveyed as did the EMRs themselves.
2. The teachers felt that performance was poorest in the academic and emotional-pyschological areas but somewhat better in the social area.

3. The EMRs generally expressed positive feelings toward school and other people but did not seem to think the feelings are reciprocated.
4. The EMRs appeared to be reasonably confident in their own abilities but said they suffer from feelings of failure when they can not perform.
5. The EMRs reported general satisfaction with their academic progress and competencies in basic skills.

What do these results mean? There appears to be a considerable gap in the perceptions of the two groups, especially related to academics. Without debate of which viewpoint is "correct," if teachers see EMRs as doing poorly, and EMRs think they are performing adequately, this indicates a problem. It could represent unrealistic expectations by teachers or goals set by the students which are too low. Another possibility is that measurement and evaluation procedures used with EMRs are inappropriate. Regardless of the reasons, the following recommendations seem appropriate:

1. Classroom teachers need more practical training in working with EMRs.
2. Prospective teachers need more exposure to field experiences which include contact with EMRs.
3. Definite policies regarding the evaluation of mainstreamed EMRs in a fair and appropriate manner should be established.
4. Better communication should be established among school, home, and the EMRs themselves about their progress in all areas.

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